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MADIGAN, WHITE URGE ILLINOIS DELEGATION TO OPPOSE DEVASTATING CUTS TO FUND THAT ASSISTS VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIMES

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Secretary of State Jesse White today urged members of the Illinois congressional delegation to fight President George Bush’s effort to zero out all monies from the federal Crime Victims’ Fund that helps victims of violent crime in Illinois and across the nation.

Madigan and White’s actions come during National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, which runs this year from April 23 to April 29.

Bush attempted a similar raid last year, but eventually was stopped. The fund, created by the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA), is supported by fines and fees paid by federal defendants – not tax revenues -- and pays approximately 60 percent of the cost of Illinois’ Crime Victim Compensation Program. The other 40 percent is funded through the General Assembly.

Madigan and White, who is Clerk of the Court of Claims, administer the Crime Victims’ Compensation Act, which can provide up to \$27,000 to help victims of violent crime pay for expenses associated with their recovery after other compensation sources, such as private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid or other public aid, have been exhausted. To be eligible for compensation, a victim must report the crime promptly to law enforcement and cooperate in the apprehension and prosecution of the offender.

“Wiping out the federal component of the Crime Victims’ Fund would devastate our ability to aid innocent victims of violent crime here in Illinois and across the nation.” Madigan said. “This funding allows us to help victims with many critical services, including burial costs, medical services and counseling services.”

“I urge our Congressional Delegation to ensure these vital funds are not cut,” White said. “This money is critical to the health and well-being of crime victims and their families in Illinois and across the country.”

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Madigan and White pointed out that recent improvements to the Crime Victims' Compensation Program in Illinois make the funding even more vital for an increasing number of victims. For example, a proposal – now law – that Madigan drafted in the last session of the General Assembly provides, when needed, for the payment of security deposits and first month's rent as relocation expenses for victims of domestic violence. Previously, that expense was not eligible for payment.

The current General Assembly has passed legislation that adds hate crimes to the list of compensable crimes and makes parents of adult homicide victims eligible for counseling expenses.

Madigan and White also reported that the time to process a crime victims' assistance application has been considerably cut. In November 2002, the average time it took the Office of the Attorney General to investigate a claim was between 250 to 270 days. That time has been reduced to 90 to 100 days.

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, the Crime Victims Compensation Program recommended financial reimbursement to crime victims and the organizations providing services to crime victims in the amount of \$23,895,472. Relevant statistics include: 5,572 applications for Crime Victim Compensation were received and investigated by Madigan's office, an increase of almost 600 applications since FY 2004; 3,714 claims were recommended for award with compensation to victims of crime and their families, hospitals and medical providers, funeral homes, counselors, and other identified service providers; and 66 percent of the claims investigated were recommended for award.

Additional information about program is available online at www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov/victims and www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov/women or by calling 1-800-228-3368.

Victims can download applications over the Internet from the Secretary of State's Web page at www.cyberdriveillinois.com by clicking on the "Help for Victims" icon or going to departments then going to Court of Claims.